

Appendix C

Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019-24 ongoing review

Introduction

The Homelessness Strategy was approved by Housing Committee in March 2019 and came into effect on 01 April 2019. The strategy set out four main objectives, with multiple sub-objectives the Council aspire to achieve over the five year life of the document.

The Council are committed to reviewing the progress the authority has made towards the ambitious targets set in 2019 and adapting to any challenges that may impact on our ability to meet our goals.

Year Three: 2021/22

The pandemic continued to have a significant impact on delivering the Housing Solutions Service as well as some further staffing changes during this year. However, despite these additional pressures there have been some fantastic achievement in meeting objectives within the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, such as:

- 1.1 Improve awareness and public knowledge
- 1.4 Improved links with social services
- 1.9 Review of website content
- 1.11 Providing monitoring information
- 1.12 Sustaining tenancies
- 2.2 Making best use of housing stock
- 2.3 Review the Housing Allocation Scheme
- 2.4 New Units
- 2.5 Fraud prevention
- 2.6 Regeneration
- 2.8 Magna Carta Lettings
- 2.11 Rough Sleepers
- 2.12 External funding bids
- 3.3 Winter provision
- 4.1 B&B usage

1.1 Improve awareness and public knowledge

The Housing Solutions team successfully submitted a bid for external funding (see 2.12) to appoint a Housing Navigator (see 2.11). This role has increased awareness of the services we provide across the voluntary sector and has re-launched the homeless task group, known as FUSE. This group brings together the Council with partner agencies and the voluntary sector to provide support to those at risk of homelessness. We have purchased and installed two emergency sleep pods in partnership with The Salvation Army

The sustainment team have met with the Foodbank, Citizens Advice, justahelpinghand to build relationships and have achieved good outcomes for customers through joint working.

1.4 Improved links with social services

Surrey County Council have launched a programme known as SAM (Surrey Adults Matter) which is a multiagency approach to individuals with severe and multiple complex needs. The Housing Navigator attends these meetings to see how we can support this cohort of people to address any housing needs, whilst other agencies support with other issues such as addiction.

1.9 Review of website content

The Corporate website has been refreshed and the data housing provide has been reviewed and refreshed to ensure that it is up to date and accurate, including contact details for services to refer households to us and for individuals to approach for support themselves.

1.11 Providing monitoring information

The Government have required weekly, monthly and quarterly returns throughout the pandemic which have always been completed on time. Additional reporting measures were introduced as part of the Governments "Everyone In" campaign and as a result of successful bids for funding.

By capturing and having up to date data we were able to identify trends and demonstrate to the external funders how we could utilise funds to improve our services.

1.12 Sustaining tenancies

A key role within the team is the prevention of homelessness and a method of doing so is by sustaining tenancies. Across the whole housing solutions team there is a join effort of negotiating with landlords, mediation between families and supporting tenants i.e. explaining tenancy rights, has led to some fantastic outcomes for individuals.

The Government announced a funding package, of which Runnymede were awarded £72,696, to support tenants in the private rented sector to reduce any rent arrears that have accrued due to the pandemic. Collectively the team have worked closely with landlords, tenants, partners including the Citizens Advice, to enable private renters to bring their rental accounts up to date and eliminate the threat of homelessness. This has been a fantastic effort by the team and they will continue to do so until the end of March 2022 when the fund needs to be spent by.

2.2 Making best use of housing stock

The Housing Allocation team have been short on staffing for large periods during this year, due to circumstances out of our control i.e. predominantly sickness. However, they have supported the Council to reduce void period and have

prioritised lettings which enables those in housing need to secure accommodation, whilst ensuring the Council's income is not reduced by long void periods.

2.3 Review the Housing Allocation Scheme

A thorough review and consultation programme was carried out and a new Housing Allocation Scheme was presented to Housing Committee in June 2021 and given approval. The refresh of the scheme ensures that it is lawful and includes all legislative changes since the previous scheme was adopted. A number of the proposals will improve the service the team provide to the public.

2.4 New Units

A number of new units have been developed over this year including a 34 unit affordable housing scheme with Accent in Egham, a 9 unit scheme with Optivo at St Peters hospital and the use of Parkside in partnership with Accent to initially provide 12 properties to prevent homelessness.

2.5 Fraud prevention

The contact with Reigate and Banstead Council has been extended and this has resulted in some good results. A case that tried to deceive the Council during a homeless review was quickly identified and is being put forward for prosecution. The links with fraud have resulted in a few applications for social housing being rejected due to false and misleading information which helps to protect the limited housing stock and ensures that it is only let to those that qualify for it in accordance with the Allocation Scheme.

2.8 Magna Carta Lettings

Like in the first two years, in this third year we have been successful with further funding. This gives the Council more scope to assist those we may not ordinarily have a duty to house and as such, reduces the likelihood of someone having to sleep rough.

The team have worked hard to reduce rent arrears within Magna Carta lettings tenancies and will continue to sustain tenancies and keep debts low.

2.11 Rough Sleepers

The Council has taken huge strides in its objectives to support rough sleepers. Whilst the number of people that sleep rough in Runnymede is minimal, we believe that one person is too many, which is why we have delivered considerable outcomes over the last few years. Following on from the successful bid and delivery of two emergency sleep pods in Year Two, we have received funds in Year Three to appoint a Housing Navigator. This role is to identify anyone sleeping rough or at risk of sleeping rough and intervene so that they don't have to.

A No Second Night Out Policy will be presented to March Housing Committee which is so that we can exercise our discretion to provide housing when we

wouldn't ordinarily be required to be statute. This should trigger engagement and enable us to source longer term outcomes for rough sleepers. The Navigator is actively building pathways for individuals to overcome issues i.e. referrals into addictions services, support for victims of domestic abuse, ex-offenders etc.

We also secured funding to purchase x3 1 bedroom properties to be used as part of a housing led scheme i.e. a rough sleeper with complex needs is provided with housing and a support package with external services is then wrapped around the person to enable them to succeed.

2.12 External funding bids

This year the Council have bid successfully for **£488,607** and have also been awarded £72,696 and £11,573 (**£84,269**) for initiatives to prevent homelessness. This funds are for:

- Securing accommodation for ex-offenders in the private rented sector
- Provide accommodation and support vaccination of the homeless population
- Appointment to a Housing Navigator role
- Development of housing first/housing led scheme
- Purchase of x3 1 bedroom properties
- Payments to prevent homelessness

3.3 Winter provision

Winter provision in a night shelter was deemed unsuitable by the Government due to Covid-19, so this initial objective has been re-vamped. Rather than provide accommodation during the winter to those at threat of homelessness, we intend to implement a No Second Night Out Scheme so that we can accommodate rough sleepers at any time of year. Through the work of the Housing Navigator we will build pathways and provide support to break the cycle so that no one has to return to the streets.

4.1 B&B usage

The Council has continued to ensure that B&B use is kept to a minimum and will come in well within budget again this year. This has been through utilising the emergency sleep pods, improving move on from temporary accommodation and ensuring better engagement to achieve better outcomes. Additional funding has been obtained which should cover the majority of B&B costs for this year.

Next Steps

Whilst the pandemic has played a role in how the Housing Solutions team have delivered services, with a lot of them being provided remotely, the team have achieved some excellent outcomes, both in terms of meeting objectives within the Strategy but also for individuals.

Now that we are over the half way stage of the Strategy, we will reflect and ensure that the objectives that have not been completed are factored into our team plans for the year, whilst also managing business as usual activities and any other initiatives that come our way or changes in legislation.